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A Story of Unbridled Sex!

Until recently it was thought that the humble willow species in Australia was sterile, regenerating itself only from cuttings and broken branches taking root along waterways, each willow being entirely male or entirely female; for instance the true Weeping Willows being female and genetically identical. All this has changed through the recent influx of sexually active varieties and hybrids, creating an explosion in seedlings that were not here before and capable of clogging temperate zone river systems and diverting flood waters against unprotected river banks.

All willows in Australia were introduced, and because they were initially clones of the same sex they did not have a matching partner of the opposite sex to fertilize seeds. Well, this was thought to be so until 1993 when CSIRO scientists began to find seedling willows of both sexes in increasing numbers along tributaries of the Murray. Suddenly they were counting 100,000 one metre tall potentially promiscuous seedlings proliferating along 50kms of river where the seed-bed is ideal. It's recruitment is expotential - 100,000 trees produce a million the next time round. The germination was not noticed at first in the 1980's, as initially the numbers were small.

Already we have a dozen willow species in Australia out of some 300 world-wide so we don't want any more. Some nurseries are selling willows that are sexually very aggressive in producing viable seeds and that's presumably where the 1980's importation of male and female partners came from.

Given the combination of male and female plants and moist gravel/sand seed-beds there is a serious problem. The Black Willow introduced as a seed of both sexes is very aggressive - it germinates and produces seedlings every year, and not just at the river, but also in ditches and swampy areas, and should be totally eradicated. Crack Willow likewise in some areas. Another, the Shrub Willow, can be a serious problem in lowland areas and will interbreed readily with other species of the shrub group, provided they flower at the same time. The Pussy Willow is a major invader of swamps, away from rivers and up

quite steep slopes.

Willows are famous for being able to keep their roots alive indefinitely under water. Poplars are a close relative of willows and can flourish if the opposite sexes are together. Unlike willows they also produce root suckers. In looking for an indigenous replacement for the exotic willow, the River She-oak is not the answer in more northern climes where it rivals willows on river seed-beds.

It seems that the right willow, infertile and not en masse, in the right place is still the best way to hold the banks against flood erosion.

Chris Morris

Mystery in Mopoke Gully

Riddle - What is shiny brown, rubbery, about a centimetre thick, stands about a foot high and looks like a tall stick of asparagus? (seen in the 3rd week in December)

It was a complete mystery to me the first time I saw it, and I had to make enquiries.

A second observation was made 3 weeks later when we went out again to take a photo of the flower - I even said to Betty on the way out, "I feel I should have brought a bottle of water for that Hyacinth Orchid - it was in such a dry spot!"

I needn't have worried. The stem must have been its reservoir, because it was now only half the thickness and much higher. It had about 12 buds, three of which were open.

Their location is the Mopoke Gully water wheel foundation, and I located five altogether close by.

I understand there are many Hyacinth Orchids along Poverty Gully Track (i.e. the road, not the water-race track).

Stuart Morris

HYACINTH ORCHIDS

Hyacinth orchids are an attractive feature of the Castlemaine bushland. They are showy plants which begin growing as summer approaches. In early summer the shoot appears. The shoot looks like a glossy brown stick that resembles the stalk of Bracken Fern. When the stalk reaches about 50 cm, the pink, red-spotted flowers appear. There are no leaves at all.

Until recently, all of the local hyacinth orchids were known at *Dipodium roseum*. However, it has been realised that there are two species.

The Pink Hycacinth Orchid, *Dipodium roseum,* has deep pink flowers with red spots. The labellum is red-striped.

The Pale Hyacinth Orchid, *Dipodium pardalinum,* is much paler. The flowers are pink when they first open, but rapidly fade, and the labellum is spotted, not striped.

The two species sometimes grow together, but are easily distinguished, because of the colour difference.

Both species are growing in the Kaweka Wildflower Reserve at Castlemaine. They are common throughout the Castlemaine bushland, but are not well known, as few people walk extensively through the bushland in mid-summer. They are very common around the Hepburn District. According to "Orchids of Bendigo", the closest occurrence to Bendigo is the Mandurang Forest, so at Castlemaine we are close the northern limits of this species..

EP

Babblings from Barkers Creek, N°2

Owlet Nightjars

Further to my recent comments about Owlet Nightjars, one morning recently I virtually had Owlet Nightjars on television. Well, almost!

On my way out to feed the fish and the birds one morning I was surprised to find an Owlet Nightjar, as large as life, behind the glass "screen" in the slow combusion stove. Obviously he had dropped down the chimney during the night and was waiting for me to help him, even though he seemed very content, so I caught him and walked outside to give him a kiss and a goodbye like Rex Hunt does to the fish. However, the Owlet Nightjar did a quick reverse turn over my shoulder and flew straight back inside.

Many feathers and white Visiting Cards later my friend was winging his way through the trees to his nesting box.

Gliders

One of my disappointments since arriving in Barkers Creek is that I had not seen any possums. However, in recent weeks I have seen my first Brush-tail possum and, during the heat wave, I saw two gliders moving throught the trees on their way towards the dam. I was amazed how fast they travelled. In the torchlight they looked such wonderful and curious little aminals.

Kangaroos

Our home grown wallaby, Wally, who makes a mess of Jacqui's flowers most nights, has now been joined by a small mob of kangaroos. Probably due to the extended period of extremely dry weather, with little green grass available, the kangaroos have discovered our very green and lush front lawn. Now, particularly since I have been putting out some pellets each night for them, we have a nightly parade. Our bedroom wall facing the lawn is completely glass, and when the kangaroos arrive or move to feed during the night they trigger off the outside light and we are privileged to this wonderful display of our national icon. I tried to take a flash shot of them recently, but, in the dark, I could not find the buttons on my camera and my laughing at myself disturbed them. Well, maybe another moonlight night!

John Turnbull.

Olive-backed Orioles

During the boisterous winds of early summer a member of the local Permaculture group rescued three distressed fledglings in the Botanic Gardens - apparantly blown from the nesting tree to dangerous ground-level. It was necessary to identify them immediatly so that they could be given the correct feeding, but the only clue was that a pair of Olive-backed Orioles had been singing and feeding in that area for several weeks. The fledglings seemed to fit the description of juvenile orioles as given in a bird book, and they were handed over eventually to Ms. Susan Dehn after lots of TLC at the Permaculature office. In her capable hands they flourished for over three weeks; long enough for positive identification. Ms Dehn reported that instead of the usual yellow gape of most nestlings these had very striking pink, almost irridescent, gapes. They also seemed to have distinct personalities, and she became very attached to them, so that is was a great sadness for her to find all three dead underneath their perch without warning one morning, and without any obvious symptoms.

Shirley Parnaby

Boxing Day at Pullens Road

(Intersection of Tunnel and Red,White and Blue Tks., 7.30-8.30am)

White-winged Chough
Red Wattlebird
Fuscous Honeyeater
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
(Adult with immature bird - appeared to be feeding the young bird)
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Common Bronzewing
Superb Fairy-wren
Magpie
Hooded Robin (1♂ at 50m, but a pleasure to see)
Brown-headed Honeyeater
(foraging under bark of dead branches)
Musk Lorikeet
Rufous Whistler
Eastern Rosella (≃ 10 birds in a group)
Willie Wagtail
Olive-backed Oriole (h)
Spotted Pardalote (h)
Grey Currawong (h)
4 Long-billed Corella on Castlemaine/Maldon rd, ½ km west of Butchers Lane.

I was surprised not to have seen any thornbills.

Phillip West

67 Hunter Street, February

As usual at this time of year the honeyeaters are predominant - Yellow-faced, New Holland, and Eastern Spinebills, accompanied by juveniles. The dried patches of grassy areas are popular with a flock of Yellow-rumped Thornbills, also with young. A pair of Goldfinches and three offspring are regular visitors to the bird bath, and two juvenile Red Wattlebirds make a mess of the water with feathers and droppings all too frequently.The Rufous Whistlers are still around and occasionally

a pair of Crimson Rosellas. Flocks of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, Musk Lorikeets and Long-billed Corellas have fed noisily around this end of Hunter Street. Conspicuous by their absence are the Silvereyes. Our fruit trees have provided no pickings for them this season.

In addition to the Wirey Mistletoe observed on a False Acacia (or Black Bean) outside our fence, I have now discovered that the Mistletoe Birds have also deposited the seeds of two Box Mistletoes, which are thriving on the Narrow-leaved Peppermint.

Shirley Parnaby.

Holiday Highlights

from a Kangaroo Island Adventure

* At Mulgundawa, S.A. - Cape Barren Geese - lots.
* At Goolwa, - Dolphins, Pelicans, Swans, terns, ibis, Masked Lapwings, cormorants.

Kangaroo Island

* Morgans Lagoon - Swans, Musk Ducks, Cape Barren Geese, Mountain Ducks, Coots.
* Seal Bay - A guided tour of the beach with a Ranger - hundreds of Sea Lions. We got withing 15 metres of them.
* West Bay - Grey Shrike-thrush, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Crimson Rosellas, Kangaroos, Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters, New Holland Honeyeaters.
* Paisley Islet - Rock Parrots, Sooty Oyster-catchers, Nankeen Kestrel, albatros, terns, Rosenberg Goanna, Sea Lions.
* Cape du Covedic - Hundreds of New Zealand Fur Seals.
* Harvey's Return - we got within 10 feet of an immature Eastern Spinebill, and a male Scarlet Robin sitting in a Casuarina, all fluffed up in the heat. We also saw Dolphins.
* Walk to Ravine des Casoars - one Fairy Penguin in the caves, Rainbow Lorikeets, one large red starfish, about 12cm across, which we photographed.
* Western River - two Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, New Holland Honeyeaters, Willy Wagtails, Pelicans, Purple Swamphen.

All over the island - Silvereyes, Masked Lapwings, wrens and Tamar Wallabies.

Back in South Australia

* At the Coorong - Pelicans, Common Tern, Dotterels and a godwit.
* Parnka Point - Shingleback Lizards
* Robe - Spiney-cheeked Honeyeaters and Red-browed Finches.

Lorraine Rye

Observations

* Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, 25/6/96, feeding in pines and gums in Chewton. Two to four in number, they only stayed for a day. Also 4 Yellow Robins in the orchard trees, 7/1/97 and 7 New Holland

Honeyeaters in Yellow Pokers (Knifophia) during December '96. Three hatchings of Maned Geese (Wood Ducks) this season. There are usually only two. Predators had taken four of the seven young in the most recent hatching. Margaret Winmill

* From early in February Long-billed Corellas have been building up in numbers at North Castlemaine from ≃ 10 to ≃ 200 birds. R. Mills.

* A Fig Bird was seen in Mostyn St in January. It was calling and was plainly seen and identified. It is away out of its range. May have been an aviary escapee? Damien Cook.

* Both George Broadway and Ern Perkins have heard reports of Magpies eating European Wasps in the Chewton Area.

* On a visit to the Coorong Bluebonnets were seen on the Golf Course at Menindie. Maureen Dredge

* Indian Mynahs have been seen in Blakeley Rd. in Barkers Creek. John Turnbull

* Lots of European Wasps have been seen at Vaughan Springs and the Blue Wrens and Scrub Wrens are very wary of them. Jessie Hewetson

* A baby Ringtail Possum was found walking along the white line on the road into Tidal River just after the cool change on a very hot day. It wasn't very lively and had lost the tip of its tail. It had apparantly fallen out if its drey. It was taken to the park entrance, with clear instructions as to where it was found 17 km into the park, and, as it sparked up again that night it was able to be returned. Rita Mills.

* Fifty Pair of Scarlet Robins seen twice 4 or 5 weeks apart at Taradale. They were in a Eucalypt, same one each time, and were dropping to the ground and flying up again and feeding in the tree, too. Anne Van Gemert

RAOU Action in Woodlands

(Courtesy of the Hunter Bird Observers' Newsletter, NSW)

Clearing the woodlands in our wheat and sheep belt is affecting up to 8,000 birds every day of the year - up to 10 million birds killed or displaced annually.

Our temperate woodlands once covered vast areas, yet today only 15% of these remain, much of it fragmented and degraded. More than a quarter of our woodland birds are in decline or threatened. Uncontrolled clearing of what is left of the woodlands continues today in many parts of Australia. In the last 12 months the RAOU has -

* Raised funds for fencing of the vital habitat for the Golden-shouldered Parrot in Queensland, and the Grey-crowned Babbler in Victoria

* Identified, mapped, helped fence and re-plant areas critical for the Regent Honeyeater in NSW.

* Implemented Birds on Farms, and Tree Hollows research projects across all states.

* Co-ordinated surveys for the Swift Parrot and Red-tailed Black Cockatoo.
* Made representations to government regarding financial allocations for bird protection and habitat restoration.

Contributed, Shirley Parnaby.

G.D.T. Public Walks

Sat. 12/4 Norma's to the Monk, duration 4-5 hrs, Leader Norma D.. Meet Fryerstown Hall at 9.30am. Take snacks, lunch and water.
Sat 10/5 Working Bee, 3-4 hrs, leader Ed Butler, meet Daylesford P.O., 9.30am.

Question corner

WHAT IS THIS PLANT?

The plant was seen growing along the Loddon River during one of the recent U3A Wednsday morning walks.

The plant is Blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon).*

Blackwoods are common along the Loddon River. Some of the distinguishing features are

-the phyllodes (leaves) are multi-veined.

-the phyllodes are mostly broadest the towards the tip.

-the buds. Like most wattles, Blackwood is already in bud.

-the size, colour and shape of the buds.

-the arrangement of the buds, which are in sprays.

The phyllodes are narrower than the typical Blackwood of the district. Lightwood (*A. implexa*) is a similar species, but differs in its flowering time, the shape of the leaves, and general colour of the leaves. Lightwood is also more common on the drier hillsides, whereas, locally, Blackwood usually grows along streams.

A check along the Loddon River at Newstead, Vaughan and Glenluce over the past week showed that Blackwoods were in bud, and that the buds were very similar to those seen by members of U3A.

EP

C . F . N . C . PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

FROM THE MARCH MEETING GENERAL MEETINGS WILL BE HELD IN THE UNITING CHURCH (UCA) HALL. Either turn in just behind the Art Gallery in Lyttleton St. and park in the area down from the hall, which is closer to Mostyn St. or turn up the drive behind the Church and park there, or park in Mostyn St. and walk up the steps just behind the Mostyn St. surgery.

Fri Mar. 14 **Butterflies** Speaker is Gary Sobey of Skydancers. 8pm (UCA) hall.

Sat Mar. 15 **Skydancers Butterfly House**, Midland Highway, Harcourt. Leave CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St. 1.30pm or meet at Skydancers at 1.40pm.

NB ***March Business Meeting*** To be held a week earlier on March 20 as the 27th is the day before Good Friday.

****** Those intending to go on the overnight excursion to Glenburn, Alan Reid's property, on May 10/11, must give their names to the President (George Broadway) by the April meeting.*****

Fri Apr. 11 **Peregrine Falcons**, Vic Hurley, RAOU. Research grant. 8pm UCA hall.

Fri May 9 **Ants of the Ironbark Forests** , Simon Hinkley, Museum of Victoria. 8pm UCA hall

Sat May 10 **Autumn Overnight Excursion to Alan Reid's property, "Glenburn".**

Fri June 13 **Frogs**, Graeme Watson, Museum of Victoria. 8pm UCA hall.

Fri Oct 10 **Plants of the Ballarat District**, Pat and Bill Murphy, Ballarat F.N.C. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat Oct 11 **Local Plants**

Sat Oct 18 **Excursion to Ballarat**, all day.

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Committee: G. Broadway(Pres.), M. Willis (V.P.), M. Oliver (Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), C. Morris, K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge, J. Turnbull.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at **Uniting Church hall, Mostyn St.** (From the March meeting)

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. **All Members are invited to attend.**

Subscriptions 1997 - Ordinary Membership: Single $16 Family $24
Pensioner/Student: Single $12 Family $18. Supporting $25
Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

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Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.
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